

Products of War

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Summary: The Covenant have come to Earth, and while the Master Chief is Earth's last hope, it's last line of defense is a few brave men with nothing but some guts, MRE's, and standard-issue rifles in their hands.

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Drenched. The whole city was choked with water as it fell freely from the skies, weighing heavily on the soldiers like a woe, a dread of what could happen if they failed. Bloodshot eyes peered out from behind broken slabs of concrete and out from broken windows. Lungs filled and emptied slowly and silently, as though a mere quickening of the pulse would alert the enemy as to their whereabouts.

It used to be a four-lane road, a thoroughfare for commerce and transportation. Now it was a valley, the shadow of death cast upon it by the leering, ruined buildings that surrounded it. It seemed as though the buildings themselves, formerly businesses and office buildings, apartments and restaurants, were now withered and dying. They were wracked with a disease that ate away at their concrete flesh, bullet holes and scorch marks breaking across them like hives and boils.

A motor vehicle of some kind smoldered in the middle of the intersection, a fire even the rain struggled to put out. It blazed, vibrantly throwing smoke into the air against the rain's will, as if it were some wild, abstract dancer that continued her act even while the crowd booed and threw unmentionables on stage towards her.

Yet even in the dim light that fought its way through the thick clouds and cascading rain, a dark shadow ran the gauntlet amongst the skeletons of man's architectural achievement. It passed overhead, then went on for two or three more blocks, then slowly expanded as its progenitor descended. A smooth, bulbous, dark purple shape that seemed bloated with the evil it contained. Anger and hatred were locked within, bursting from the seems of the obese form that came

down upon the ruined city. It halted on the harsh surface for a moment, and then took flight again, somehow denying gravity's wishes and lifting its gargantuan form into the air with no visible way of supporting itself in an aerodynamic sense, and then leaving as quickly as it came.

Hunkering down beneath the windowsil of a first story office window, Wilkins gripped his battle rifle tightly, shivering within his battered, dark gray ODST armor. He peered out into the street, not from the window, but from a small hole, some four inches in diameter, that had been caused by intense fighting earlier in the week. How many days ago was it now? Two? Three? He wasn't sure. They had all started to run together, his mind racing at intense speeds from a mix of tension and constant combat readiness that had been ingrained in him at boot. Always tired, always weary, always aching, but always watchful, always alert, always ready to kill at a moment's notice. 'The Covie's don't take breaks from killing us' he thought to himself hours before, 'so I'll return the favor.' Well, at least it had seemed that he had thought that hours ago. God he needed a warm shower and a soft bunk to get some sleep in. Real sleep. Not this 'one-eye-open' catnapping that drove a man insane, lying there, not truly awake, but more awake than slumbering, your eyes flying open like shutters if even the slightest noise hit your ears. And even when you weren't jumping up and pointing your rifle at every loose pebble that fell on the floor, you were thinking about it, wondering if that was a warm breeze on your neck or just the exhaled breath from some Covie bastard who was about to knife you in the back.

The long-range comm. was out, all they had left was the short-range headsets used for squad chatter. But the six of them didn't have much to talk about, and even if they were as talkative as a bunch of old maids, they couldn't do it, not while the Covenant were in the area and they were isolated from support. Maybe they couldn't decipher the human language. Maybe they wouldn't even know what it meant. But they'd get the gist of it, and they'd know where it was coming from. Then the Covenant would be all over Wilkins and his squadmates, outnumbered and outgunned, isolated from support and with rapidly decreased munitions. They'd be fresh, ready to see some action, with itchy trigger-fingers or trigger-claws or...whatever they had. Wilkins' squad would just be tired, hungry, and fighting to survive. The odds weren't that good. If onl-

His reverie was cut short as clearly audible footsteps could be heard just outside the building. But he hadn't seen anything move outsi...then he loloked again, and saw that the rain outside the front door parted oddly, and didn't land on the sidewalk, not at first anyway. It was hitting something that shimmered and waved, something unnatural. It was active camo! Damn covies had brought in the invisible goons to take us out! He could make out one shape, an elite, it was crouched down or something, moving slightly. To its back was a constant flurry of shapes, and Wilkins figured it out quickly. That one was guarding the door while his buddies were running inside the building, literally under Wilkins' nose!

He moved his hand slowly, quietly, and pulled back the lever on the side of his rifle, clearing the chamber, and let it go just as easily, not wanting to make any excess noise. The room he was in was about twelve by ten feet square, the wall facing the street having the shattered window that Wilkins' lay prone beneath, the rest of the room pretty barren except for some scattered pieces of paper and

debris from the ceiling. There was a large, thick oak desk at the rear of the room, where Wilkins had stockpiled his rations and the rest of his kit, but the door to the room, which was to his left, was not closed. It opened outwards, and was flung almost completely out of the way, giving a clear view down the length of the hallway which had two more doors along the right side, along the left was a banister with a single oak bar running the length of it and supported by evenly spaced oak rods, and at the far end on the left, the top of the staircase. Wilkins adjusted, shifting himself around so that he was behind the left side of the doorway, his head and rifle peeking out, his eye staring down the scope. His breathing sounded rambunctious inside his helmet, and he almost wanted to stop altogether, just so they wouldn't hear him. He took his right hand and reached slowly around to his hip, grabbing a grenade, and bringing it around to his left hand, slightly above his head, and removing the pin while holding the safety. He set the pin gently at his side, not wanting to make the slightest noise, and pulled his arm back.

Just then, he saw the wavy shape of a large, six to seven foot tall creature come up to the top of the stairs. He didn't wait to decipher it, he simply hurled the grenade towards the shape. The softball-sized object came to a halt at its feet, and the creature almost stumbled backwards, startled at the ambush, and the shape shimmered as the creature prepared to leap downstairs. The grenade went off first, however, and threw the now visible elite out of Wilkins' vision with a anguished scream. Wilkins quickly got up to his feet, and crept around to peer over the banister. The smoke and dust had scattered over the Covenant on the stairs, and he saw a grunt who's active camo had been shorted struggled underneath the smoking, bloody mess of an elite, while three of his budy shook their heads and tried to regain their footing. The dust and dirt had covered them, and Wilkins could make out enough ot know where to shoot. He hefted the rifle to his shoulder and pulled the trigger.

The rifle spat three rounds into the stomach of the first grunt, a light blue fluid erupting onto the floor as he doubled over. The next burst hit the second ground in the mouthpiece of his breather, throwing the grunt off-balance and onto his back, flailing wildly as his only means of respiration leaked out into the room with a stinking, angry hiss. The third grunt managed to bring his pistol around and started charging it, but Wilkins put three rounds into his shoulder, tearing away chunks of flesh and bone that left the arm dangling uselessly at his side by small strands. The muscles in his hands flexed, and the gun went off, lighting the room in green luminescence as the shot flew wildly downwards, melting away two of the steps. Another burst to the chest put that grunt out of action. The marine moved cautiously over to where the final grunt, screaming in some unintelligable way, struggled to free himself from his leader's corpse. Wilkin's could only see his head and his chest, the rest covered by the dead elite, his dark eyes glaring out in horror from the shadow of the fallen elite, slcik, blue blood dripping onto his face in what must have been a terrible rhythm to the death march playing through his mind. The grunt began to shake violently, more out of fear than an attempt to escape, screaming louder than before. Then the sickening crack of metal against flesh could be heard once, twice, and again, and the screaming stopped. The marine pulled his rifle butt away, leaving a disgusting, bluish mess of the grunt's face on the ground and on his weapon.

His breathing was faster than ever, his heart pounding in his ears. Then he heard more gunfire, outside, and he made his way over the tops of the dead bodies and down the steps, to the first floor.

End
file.